

Cultivating effective teams

Effective project leadership

The elements of influencing

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# Creating an effective influencing statement

Introductions in literature are important. Think of the opening lines of a good book—they help set the tone for what the reader can expect going forward. Introductions are important in project management too, especially when you are hoping to influence a stakeholder to consider and approve a new plan or idea.

In this reading, we will help you apply techniques you can use to influence others. We will take you through the steps of creating a strong **influencing statement** that opens the conversation and sets you up for success with your audience.

## What is influencing?

First, let's review what it means to influence another person. **Influencing** is the ability to alter another person's thinking or behaviors. If you have ever tried to persuade another person to understand your point of view, then you know that influencing is easier said than done.

## Conger's four steps

In his article, *The Necessary Art of Persuasion*, Jay A. Conger identified four steps to effectively influence another person to consider new ideas.

As you learned earlier, those steps are:

1. **Establish credibility**
2. **Frame for common ground**
3. **Provide evidence**
4. **Connect emotionally**

Throughout your career in project management, there will be times when you will need to influence someone to consider an idea, approve a plan, or complete a project task. Conger's four steps provide a useful framework for thoughtfully approaching conversations that are important to project success and influencing stakeholders. Let's explore each step further before applying them to an influencing statement:

### 1. Establish credibility

When trying to persuade another person to listen to you, it helps to establish credibility. Ask yourself, why should this person listen to you? According to Conger, it is best to draw credibility from both expertise and relationships.

You can build credibility by showing a level of expertise on the topic at hand. It also helps to have "a history of sound judgement." If you find that you lack expertise on a subject, don't worry! You can work to increase your knowledge through education or research, or you can even ask an expert for help.

You can also build credibility through strong relationships with your audience and others around you. Conger found that influential leaders tend to show their trustworthiness and willingness to do right by their colleagues over time, and in turn, people are more likely to listen to them.

### 2. Frame for common ground

The next step in effectively persuading people is to frame for common ground. You can do this by making a case for how your idea would benefit your audience, and you can determine how your ideas will benefit your audience by gaining a strong understanding of them and what they value. Pay close attention to what matters to your audience by listening carefully and gathering information during meetings and conversations. Then they frame your ideas based on your audience's needs and interests.

### 3. Provide evidence

The third step is to provide evidence that supports your ideas. As Conger notes, though numbers are important, the best persuaders pair numbers with vivid language. They share stories, examples, and metaphors to help influence their audiences. Using vivid language can help bring your figures to life and draw stakeholders' interest to your proposal.

### 4. Connect emotionally

The fourth step is to connect emotionally with your audience. In this step, you illustrate that you are emotionally invested in the idea that you are presenting. But crucially, Conger notes, you must also do your best to determine and match the emotional state of your audience.

## Applying Conger's steps to an influencing statement

Conger's four steps—establish credibility, frame for common ground, provide evidence, and connect emotionally—are meant to be applied throughout important conversations with those whom you aim to influence. But to set yourself up for success during these conversations, you can apply the four steps to the influencing statement that sets the stage for your idea.

Let's discuss how Conger's four steps come together in the following example:

Carmen is a project manager at a small marketing agency. She would like to convince a human resources director at her organization to approve a new process for onboarding new graphic design employees.

Though the company has an existing onboarding process, this process is the same for all new hires, regardless of role. As a project manager working in the human resources department, she learns that it is hard for newly-hired graphic designers to onboard since there are only a few people who hold graphic design roles at the company. Carmen identifies that there is a lack of information available for new graphic design hires to turn to for learning about procedures and software specific to their role.

Carmen would like to propose that all new graphic design hires receive a digital welcome packet containing guidelines for installing software, processes to be aware of, and other design-specific onboarding documents. Carmen developed a similar process in her role at a previous company, and it received a positive response from employees. She thinks a similar process will work for her new organization too, so she sets up time with her director to present her idea.

To influence her director to approve the new process, Carmen opens her presentation with a strong influencing statement:

*I'd like to propose a new onboarding process for graphic design hires.*

**(Provide evidence)** *In reviewing our new hire surveys, 80% of recent graphic design hires have assigned a negative rating to our onboarding process. When I followed up with respondents, I learned that our graphic designers lack access to relevant information that could help them acclimate to our organization faster. To address this issue, I would like to create a digital welcome packet containing design-specific onboarding documentation.*

**(Frame for common ground)** *I have met with leaders on the graphic design team to discuss this idea, and they agreed that a design-specific onboarding process might help increase the productivity of new hires, since a better onboarding process would enable them to be better prepared to take on projects in their first few weeks on the job.*

**(Establish credibility)** *In my previous role, I designed a similar, role-specific onboarding process, which increased our new hire satisfaction rates by 60%. I think a new process could benefit employees here, as well.*

**(Connect emotionally)** *It can be overwhelming to join a new company. A smoother, more personalized onboarding experience might help set the tone for the kind of support new graphic design hires can expect from our team.*

## Key takeaway

In this influencing statement, the project manager:

- **Provided evidence** from company surveys to set the stage for her proposal.
- **Framed for common ground** by noting how a new onboarding process might increase employee productivity.
- **Established credibility** by outlining her previous experience with launching similar processes.
- **Connected emotionally** by encouraging her audience to reflect on past experiences they may have endured as a new hire.

By opening with a strong influencing statement, you can set yourself up for a successful conversation that is more likely to persuade your audience and achieve your goals.

